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From: Maier, Brent
Sent: Fri 2/13/2015 8:41:56 PM
Subject: FYI - Calif. lawmakers push state board to allow more pumping from delta

Letter to State Water Resources Control Board Chairwoman Felicia Marcus mentioned in article was signed by Senator Dianne Feinstein, Rep. Kevin McCarthy, Rep. Ken Calvert, Rep. Jim Costa, Rep. Jeff Denham, Rep. Devin Nunes and Rep. David Valadao.

Calif. lawmakers push state board to allow more pumping from delta

Annie Snider, E&E reporter - Published: Friday, February 13, 2015

With entrenched drought threatening to force water rationing in Southern California this year, the state's lawmakers are upping pressure on state and federal agencies to allow greater exports of water out of the environmentally sensitive Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta.

The latest skirmish comes in the form of a petition from the Bureau of Reclamation and California's Department of Water Resources to the State Water Resources Control Board -- California's environmental regulator -- proposing specific changes that would allow the system to be operated more flexibly to send more water south to farms and cities.

Last week, the State Water Board signed off on some of the petition's provisions but not the key change adjusting water export rates that would have allowed larger amounts to be pumped out of the delta during times of lower flows. Despite the support of federal and state resource agencies, the board's executive director raised concerns about potential impacts the move could have on endangered fish species. He said the board would consider the option further at a meeting next week.

But Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) and congressmen representing agriculture-heavy central and southern California districts are asking the board's chairwoman to reconsider the decision immediately.

"Water is so precious during our State's extraordinary drought that agencies need immediate flexibility, based on best available information, to maximize the benefit from every drop for both human and environmental need," they wrote to State Water Resources Control Board Chairwoman Felicia Marcus this week.

The lawmakers stressed that the controversial provision does not pit fish against people.

"We know the exports can be done without harm to fish," they said. "Three Federal and State fish agencies, solely responsible for ensuring the application of the Endangered Species Act for protected species in the Delta, concurred with [the proposal]."

At a House Energy and Water Development Appropriations Subcommittee hearing on the Bureau of Reclamation's budget yesterday, California lawmakers asked the bureau's commissioner, Estevan López, to keep fighting for the change.

"I respect the fact we have the Endangered Species Act to deal with, but if we're not threatening the species and we're unable to pump, that doesn't make a lot of sense," said Rep. Ken Calvert, a Republican representing a swath of Southern California.

In the time since the denial was made, Calvert said at least 10,000 acre-feet of water that could have been sent south was released into the bay. The decision is now under appeal.

Lawmakers in both the House and Senate also used this week's budget hearings with Reclamation to press for swift work on a handful of studies on expanding storage capacity at reservoirs in California that must be completed soon in order to be eligible for the \$2.7 billion tagged for storage in the water bond passed by California voters last year.

"We've had reports, we've had studies, we've had technical evaluations, we've had evaluations of environmental reviews -- if all that stuff was water, the drought would be over," Calvert said yesterday. "At the end of the day, we've got to finish these studies, and we've got to get on with it and start building reservoirs."

At a separate budget hearing Wednesday, Feinstein tried to get López to commit to deadlines for key studies relating to additional storage -- something López said he could not provide specifics on, although he promised that several were coming "soon."

Not all Californians were convinced that storage is the solution to drought, though.

"As humans, we have to start looking at the essence of the limiting factor that waster presents and how we look at our population, how we look at growth and how we manage," Rep. Mike Honda, a Democrat who represents Silicon Valley, said yesterday. "Storage is one way, but it's not the answer to this thing we call a drought."

Link to Letter: http://www.eenews.net/assets/2015/02/13/document_daily_02.pdf

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